DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 780 CS 500 511

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TITLE Futurism and Communication Education.
INSTITUTION Indiana Speech Association.
PUB DATE Sep 73
NOTE 7p.
JOURNAL CIT Indiana Speech Notes; v7 n3 p6-10 September 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Educational Change; *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; Policy Formation; Prediction; Secondary Education; Social Change; *Speech Education; *Speech Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Interpersonal Communication

ABSTRACT

Organized study of possible futures of all types of communication should be initiated immediately in high schools, colleges, and advanced research institutions. Interpersonal communication particularly requires attention since scholarly predictions for future social change involve the reduction of meaningful interpersonal relationships. If applied, the methodological approach used by those who study futures would benefit the study and teaching of speech communication. A national effort is needed to set up guidelines for the rational control of the future direction of communication and the direction of the future, as well. (CH)

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INDIANA SPEECH NOTES

Published by

The Indiana Speech Association

Volume VII | September 1973 | Number 3

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FUTURISM AND COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

James Redfield

INTRODUCTION

> The first report of the National Goals Research Staff, released by the White House in July, 1970, 'emphasized the importance of defining policy alternatives for the nation as it speeds toward the year 2000 in an era of inquiry, confrontation and technological achievement,' but concluded that the White House cannot set goals for America. Rather, 'the Government should instead provide the information the public needs to engage in debate about the sort of society it wants."

Futurism as an area of study and research provides the basis for goal setting. This allows people to design that society wanted. The purpose of this paper is to suggest some of the background one in communication education might need to define policy alternatives for the future. The changes which might be coming in the educational system and some direction for communication education will be presented. In particular, some concepts will be defined, some guidelines for education reviewed, futurism and communication will be compared, and some specific policies and research for future given.

> This concern for the future falls into three time ranges: the near range, or the next few years; the middle range, extending to about 1980-1985; and the far range, from 1985 to 2000 and beyond.[2]

The limits of this paper will be for the middle range of time which is the rest of this decade and the decade of the 1980's. The paper will attempt to set up guidelines and suggestions for the communication education community. Before doing that, the basic concepts of the study of the future or futurism need to be explained.

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[1]Richard C. Londsdale, "Futurism: Its Development, Content, and Methodology," Educational Futurism 1985, ed. Walter G. Hack, (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1971) p. 7.

[2]Londsdale, p. 8.

Some Concepts Clarified

> In the developing field of futurism, three concepts have gained wide currency and special utility: alternative future, scenario, and system break.[3]

The alternative future is a general set of future conditions. The scenario is a step-by-step progress to the future. System breaks are disruptive uncertainties in the progress toward the future.[4] For our purposes, the planning of alternative futures and scenarios for all levels of communication education is important. Of particular usefulness for research and for study of possible futures are five methods used by other fields.

Some methods of research. The person interested in doing studies of futurism in communication education should consider five methods.

The Delphi technique uses a panel of experts who render specific forecasts. The cross-impact matrix attempts to assess the impact of events on each other and is a refinement of the Delphi technique. Simulation/gaming techniques attempt to measure the inter-action of various alternative paths to the future. Forecasting value changes attempts to see how values shift as elements of alternative futures. Evaluating policies includes the cost and other important factors of future policies. All of these methods might be used at one time or another by people in the field of communication education.

Leaders in the educational field may use the Delphi technique to make forecasts of changes coming in the next decade in education. An Educational Future game may be developed to simulate the possible futures and their impact on education systems. New objectives and other factors of the curriculum will allow for improved methods of evaluation for all policies including new curricula methods. As a part of this step, new guidelines for action must be considered.

GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATION

Walter D. Hack, writing in the report of the 1985 Committee of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration,[5] set up eight guidelines for the implementation of the study of futurism in education.

1. The people in the individual systems must start with themselves and the individual organization to plan for the future.

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[3]Londsdale, p. 10.

[4]Londsdale, p. 11.

[5]Walter G. Hack, Educational Futurism 1985, (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1971), p. 306.

2. A team must be established to work on the design of the plan.

3. The team members must read widely in the literature on futurism.

4. The parameters of the project must be designed with a built-in flexibility.

5. The major components of the study must be determined.

6. Small units should review the work as it progresses with feedback from the larger community.

7. The policies must be developed to get to the alternative futures.

8. It must be made to work.

These guidelines may be applied in both education and communication education.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER CHANGES

In addition to predicting changes in educational systems, one must be made aware of the interaction of changes in the other disciplines and changes in society. Kahn and Wiener writing in The Year 2000 suggested that the need for such guidelines and for such planning is great.

> "Thus in policy research we are not only concerned with anticipating future events and attempting to make the desirable more likely and the undesirable less likely. We are also trying to put policy-makers in a position to deal with whatever future actually arises, to be able to alleviate the bad and exploit the good...New and rapidly innovating technologies; vast political, social, and economic upheavals accompanying the worldwide mushrooming of population; the continued development of mass communication; and the less spectacular but equally consequential processes of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization are obvious facets of the second half of this century."[6]

From these projections, the authors presented a list of 135 innovations for the last third of the century.[7] Some of the mere significant projections for those people in communication education would include the following.

Some of the possible influences which might relate to education and communication education include (1) new techniques for adult instruction, (2) supereffective relaxation and sleep, (3) intensive centralization of information in high speed data processors, (4) more reliable "educational" techniques for affecting human behavior, (5) new techniques for surveillance, monitoring and control of individuals, (6) new techniques to educate

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[6]Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, The Year 2000, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 3.

[7]Kahn and Wiener, pp. 51-57.

children, (7) inexpensive high-capacity, worldwide, regional, and local communication, (8) more use of computers for teaching and other uses, (9) home education via video and computerized and programmed learning and (10) new methods of rapid language teaching.

These are lists of technological influences which might relate to education and communication education. The social changes which would result from such innovations can also be projected. Of most importance is the relationship of communication education in meeting such a challenge.

COMMENTS ON COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Robert T. Oliver has suggested in "A View Ahead: The Speech Profession in 1984" that we have a responsibility for service in the future.

> "Our profession, if we rise adequately to its challenges, is more than secure. Its period of greatest service should lie in the years ahead. At the highest levels of government, business, and community life, the most capable people are well aware that their ability to communicate orally and directly, in face-to-face situations, is the last great capacity they must master.
>
> At the lowest levels, the under-employed and the unemployable suffer special disabilities because they do not properly interpret what is said to them and because they lack skill in presenting themselves in acceptable forms.
>
> For everyone - high, low, and medium - the psychologists and the sociologists are insisting that mental health and social compatability, leading to self-satisfaction and constructive communal relationships, depend to a very large degree upon the ability to articulate for oneself and for others one's truest and deepest thoughts and feelings.[8]

The need for speech training and communication education will be of importance in the immediate future, the middle future and the long-range future.

The impact of new research and a clearly defined concept of what communication education really should be about in the future was well summed up by D. Thomas Porter and Jeam M. Civikly. They described graduate education for Winston Smith in the year of 1984.

> With videophones, computeriques, the CURES talks, 100% mastery, $30.000 graduate programs, Class Five designations and human engineering, the world of Winston Smith encompasses several assumptions and implications which warranted discussion. The article

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[8]Robert T. Oliver, "A View Ahead: The Speech Profession in 1984," Today's Speech, 20, No. 4, (1972), p. 11.

assumed that: 1984 could in fact take place, extrinsic modification is superior to intrinsic modification of behavior, and behavioral objectives must be understandable, worthwhile, and valid. The implications of the 1984 model were: the need for a major shift from the status of a field to that of a discipline, the revolutionary changes in learning and instructional strategems, the need for a taxonomy of communication careers, the implications for communicologists trained today and yesterday, and the practical realities of graduate institution finance.[9]

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

We need to know where we have been and what has happened in the area of communication education since the second world war. We need to publish Volume II of The History of Speech Education in America. This would provide researchers and interested students with a concise resource of the major changes which have happened in the field of communication education. Getting the past together is recommendation number 1.

We need to know where we are right now. We need a national study of communication education at all levels. The general areas of research would include (1) what is being taught, (2) who is teaching it, and (3) who is being taught. The study would include communication education in the elementary schools, in the junior high schools, in the secondary schools, in the community and junior colleges, in the liberal arts colleges, in colleges and universities, at graduate level, and in all forms of organizational and adult education. Included in the research would be evalutations of instruction. The study needs to be nationwide in scope and might draw upon all the work from the 1960's in this area. Specific influences of interpersonal communication theory and intrapersonal communication are to be studied. Where we are now is recommendation number 2.

We need to implement Walter Hack's recommendations in the form of future guidelines. We need teams of people at all levels to study the future. The SCA should sponsor workshops to train teams of people in the area of futurism. The SCA should expand committees working in the area to design components for a future project. As a part of this project, specific policies in terms of communication education must be developed. Designing the future of communication education is recommendation number 3.

In conclusion, the ideas and hints at coming innovations in education should be considered now. To get into action is recommendation number 4.

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[9]D. Thomas Porter and Jean M. Civikly, "Graduate Education in 1984: Bye, Bye American Pie?" Today's Speech, 20, No. 4, (1972), p. 33.